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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [IZ](#) [IT](#) [UNSC](#) [IRAQI](#) [FREEDOM](#)

SUBJECT: IRAQ: ITALIANS FOCUSED ON UN MANDATE, TROOP PARTNERSHIP, NOT EMBEDDING

REF: A. STATE 111092

[1](#)B. ROME 2115

Classified By: Acting Pol M/C Jonathan Cohen for reasons 1.4 (a), (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. Senior Advisor and Coordinator for Iraq Policy Ambassador Richard Jones and CENTCOM Deputy Commander LTG Lance Smith led a delegation to Rome July 6-7 to discuss the way forward in Iraq with senior Italian diplomatic and military officials. The Italians stressed that Italy's continuing presence in Iraq is a political decision conditioned on the request of the Iraqi government and an international legal framework, preferably in the form of a new UN Security Council resolution, and domestic Italian politics. They will not embed troops in Iraqi units, but will continue to mentor them. End summary.

[1](#)2. (C) Ambassador Jones and LTG Smith led an interagency delegation to Rome July 6-7 as follow-up to the Ref A "Engaging the coalition" demarche. The delegation met with senior diplomatic and military officials from Prime Minister Berlusconi's office, the Italian General Defense Staff, Defense Minister's Martino's office, and the MFA. At the Prime Minister's office, Ambassador Jones and LTG Smith met with Berlusconi's Military Advisor LTG Alberto Ficuciello, Deputy National Security Advisor equivalent Gianpaolo Scarante, and Diplomatic Advisors Francesco Talo and Marco Carnelos. At the MOD, the delegation met with CHOD Admiral Giampaolo Di Paola, Vice CHOD LTG Fabrizio Castagnetti, Diplomatic Advisor to the Minister, Achille Amerio, Vice Chief of the Department of Planning, Rear Admiral Rino Me, Vice Chief of the Joint Operational Command, Major General Tommaso Ferro, CHOD Chief of Staff, Rear Admiral Luigi Binelli Mantelli, and Joint Special Operations Commander, Brigadier General Marco Bertolini. At the MFA, the delegation met with Deputy Political Director Giacomo Sanfelice, NATO Office Director Giovanni Brauzzi, and Iraq Task Force Director Luigi Maccotta. Ambassador Jones also participated in a separate meeting chaired by Maccotta focusing on political and economic developments (septel). Acting Political Minister Counselor, PolOff, and Defense Attache also attended the meetings.

Seeking a New International Legal Framework

[1](#)3. (C) In each of the meetings the Italians stressed the need for a UN "umbrella" to help legitimize Italy's continuing presence in Iraq. Defense Minister Martino's Diplomatic Advisor Achille Amerio was most direct, stating that a new legal structure in the form of a new UN mandate would be "very helpful" in view of Italian national elections next spring. The new mandate would be most useful if it were more than a reiteration or extension of UNSCR 1546, he said, taking into account the progress that has been made. Vice CHOD Castagnetti (soon to become the Commander of the Joint Operational Command) echoed these views, asking what the US envisions (what is "Plan B?") should the political process get derailed, a question raised in each meeting.

[1](#)4. (C) At the PM's office, Deputy National Security Advisor Scarante, stressing that Italy's presence in Iraq is a political decision, said that PM Berlusconi is focused on two points: demonstrating to the public that the Italian presence is making a difference and that the situation is improving -- and winning the Italian elections next May. Italy's continuing presence therefore has two conditions: 1) a specific request by the Iraqi government and 2) an international legal framework, preferably in the form of a UN resolution. General Ficuciello (who lost a son in the November 12, 2003 Nassiriyah bombing) echoed these statements, noting that public opinion drives politics, and that the closer Italy gets to its own elections, the more it needs an international political umbrella to cover its presence in Iraq.

[1](#)5. (C) Ambassador Jones responded that the Iraqi government has already on several occasions (most recently at the June Brussels conference) made statements expressing the value of the Coalition's presence and requesting that the mandate be continued. For planning purposes, he said, we need to start working on a solution by September to bridge the gap between

the end of the current resolution's mandate (the end of the political process -- presumably the December elections) and the time at which the newly elected Iraqi government will be in place and capable of making a new request for continued coalition presence (which could be weeks after the actual elections). LTG Smith agreed that it was very likely the new government would ask the Coalition to stay, but recognized that Coalition partners might make decisions based on domestic political considerations and therefore needed a justification for staying beyond the December elections.

16. (C) Responding to the question of "what is Plan B," Ambassador Jones explained that UNSCR 1546 remains valid through the end of the political process, whether that be in December or delayed by several months or longer (as provided for in the TAL). He expressed "cautious optimism," however, that the process was moving ahead on schedule, with greater representation of the Sunni population, and fully expected the drafting committee to complete the new constitution before the August 15 deadline.

Embedding vs. Partnership

17. (S) The Italians were firmly opposed -- on legal grounds -- to the concept of embedding their troops with Iraqi troops. Under the current parliamentary mandate, CHOD Di Paola explained, Italian troops in Iraq cannot participate in "intentionally offensive operations" that may be required by Iraqi troops. (Comment: The Italian mission in Iraq, Operation Antica Babilonia, is a "humanitarian" mission. Attempts to change the mission would not only enflame an already hostile public but would require a new parliamentary mandate, something Berlusconi probably would be unwilling to risk in the current political environment. End comment.) Di Paola noted, however, that Italian troops are effectively "semi-embedded" since they work and plan with the Iraqis, though they are not physically located with them. This seemed a satisfactory approach in the areas where Italian forces are located, he said. General Smith agreed, saying that partnership is the concept that matters, and that he had seen personally that it works well in the Italian case in Nassiriyah.

18. (S) General Ficuciello reiterated Admiral Di Paola's view, explaining that Italy has a different approach ("partnership") that is working quite well: train the Iraqi forces and then let them do the job. LTG Smith agreed that this approach contributes to our goals of mentoring and promoting leadership, though it does not give the Iraqis the access to intelligence or communications abilities that embedding would. The important thing, both sides agreed, was that the Iraqis take control of their own security forces. Italian partnership with Iraqi forces in their AOR was contributing satisfactorily to that goal.

Troop Withdrawals

19. (S) LTG Smith opined that MNF-I Commander General Casey probably would ask for more forces as the December elections near, but that after that there would be a potential to reduce forces. Admiral Di Paola asked if a 30-40 percent reduction in 2006 was reasonable. LTG Smith replied that it might be, but withdrawing too soon would leave a vacuum liable to create a situation like that of 1980s Afghanistan that allowed the Taliban to take over. (Comment: Apart from the CHOD's question, none of the Italian interlocutors spoke of numbers or deadlines. All agreed with the US strategy of condition-based withdrawal, and were visibly relieved to hear LTG Smith mention potential reductions in 2006. At the G-8 Summit in Gleneagles, PM Berlusconi reiterated his intention of withdrawing, in coordination with Coalition partners, 300 troops in September, a move that would still leave Italy with approximately 3,000 troops in Iraq. End comment.)

Insurgency

10. (C) The Italians also were eager to hear US views on the Iraq insurgency, both in terms of numbers and tactics. LTG Smith said he expected violence to be volatile and probably to grow as the December elections near, noting that though

fewer in numbers, the insurgents are developing more sophisticated techniques. Ambassador Jones added that the insurgents' new strategy of intimidation is aimed at the Iraqi people and other Arab nationals (such as the Egyptian Ambassador whose murder became publicly known during these meetings) whose countries were supporting the Iraqi government. Ambassador Jones argued that such attacks might cause some countries to pull back in the short-term, but that in the long-term it would hurt the terrorists own interests. Both sides agreed that the election of a new, permanent

government and decreased visibility of coalition forces would help stem the violence.

¶11. (S) To counter the insurgency, LTG Smith said the US strategy is to turn over more and more of the responsibility to the Iraqi security forces, who have a better idea of what is going on in their own cities, and to consolidate coalition bases to areas outside of the cities, lowering the visibility of the coalition forces. In response to General Ficuciello's question about whether the Iraqi people's perception of the coalition forces was improving, General Smith cited the increased number of tip-offs received as evidence that the Iraqi people are tired of the insurgency and willing to help the coalition in their efforts to defeat it. However, he noted, the perception varies from province to province; in al-Anbar, for example, we will always be considered occupiers.

Regional Actors -----

¶12. (C) Several of the Italian officials inquired about the role of regional actors such as Syria and Iran. Both Ambassador Jones and LTG Smith responded that the US is watching Iran carefully, though so far there have been no overt attempts to oppose our efforts. They expressed more concern about Syria and its role in allowing foreign fighters to cross into Iraq. Ambassador Jones said the US is urging all of Iraq's neighbors to be supportive of the political process and not to view it in terms of a Shia-Sunni problem, and is encouraging countries like Saudi Arabia and Kuwait to forgive Iraq's debt to help improve the economic situation.

NATO Training Mission -----

¶13. (C) Both the MFA and MOD stressed Italy's strong commitment to the NATO Training Mission (NTM-I), including leadership of the war college, staff college and junior officers college in Ar-Rustamiyah, as well as bilateral training conducted in Italy. Force protection, however, remains a concern for Italy. MFA Deputy Political Director Sanfelice urged the US to enlist other Coalition members in protecting the NATO forces, and MFA NATO Office Director Brauzzi suggested that some of the countries that are withdrawing from the Coalition might be persuaded to contribute to NTM-I's force protection.

¶14. (U) Ambassador Jones has cleared this cable.

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